



MINNESOTA VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL

DEDICATION CEREMONY

State Capitol Grounds

Saint Paul, Minnesota

September 26, 1992

Minnesota
Vietnam
Veterans
Memorial



TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
"The Young Dead Soldiers" by Archibald MacLeish	3
Why We Are Here Today	4
Schedule of Events	5
The Memorial	6
How to Locate a Name	7
History of the Minnesota Vietnam Veterans Memorial	8
Board of Directors	9
The Vietnam War: A Chronology	10
A Final Thank You.....	11

R. Hamilton Smith



There was a woman who lived on a farm outside Stillwater; one of her sons commanded an armored personnel carrier in Vietnam. On a cold March day in 1969, she saw a military car approach slowly down the long gravel driveway. Instinct told her why it had come. This same event was repeated hundreds of times between 1962 and 1975 for families all over Minnesota. As the colonel approached the house, the woman locked the door and said, "No, you can't come in."

"We buried our dead, but we never even said thank you. Now it's time."

Gary Wisbar, Vietnam veteran

"I have never been ashamed of you and what happened in Vietnam. I am ashamed of the way the American people treated the Vietnam veteran. I am the only one who visits your grave on Memorial Day."

Tony Shereck, son of James John Shereck, KIA

The Young Dead Soldiers
by Archibald MacLeish

The young dead soldiers do not speak.

Nevertheless, they are heard in the still houses:
who has not heard them?

They have a silence that speaks for them at night
and when the clock counts.

They say: We were young. We have died. Remember us.

They say: We have done what we could but
until it is finished it is not done.

They say: We have given our lives but
until it is finished no one can know what our lives gave.

They say: Our deaths are not ours; they are yours;
they will mean what you make them.

They say: Whether our lives and our deaths were for
peace and a new hope or for nothing we cannot say;
it is you who must say this.

They say: We leave you our deaths. Give them their meaning.

We were young, they say. We have died. Remember us.

"The Young Dead Soldiers" by Archibald MacLeish.
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Don Pitlik

Why We Are Here Today



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For more than 10 years during the 1960s and '70s we sent our young men and women to fight a war for this country. In the words of Archibald MacLeish, they did what they could. Many of them gave their lives.

Now we have an obligation to remember these soldiers and to make sense of their deaths. It is the least we can do. It is all we can do. The responsibility we gave to them has now come back to rest with us.

What were the meanings of their lives? They never had the chance to find out for themselves — their average age was only 19. As Robert F. Kennedy asked in a 1968 speech, "Which of them might have written a poem? Which of them might have cured cancer? Which of them might have played in a World Series or given us the gift of laughter from the stage or helped build a bridge or a university? Which of them would have taught a child to read? It is our responsibility to let these men live. . . ."

We are here today knowing that we cannot make them live. But we can at least make their *names* live. We can let their names forever remind us that the price of war is high, that people lose their lives, their wholeness, their innocence. And we can give their deaths meaning, respect and honor.

We are not here to make political statements about the war, to say whether it was good or bad, right or wrong. We are here, rather, to accept that the war happened. That 68,000 Minnesotans went to help fight it. That 1,077 of them were killed. And that 43 are still missing.

This Memorial will be a lasting reminder of what those Minnesotans gave. It will say that the people of this state will not let their soldiers be forgotten, that the deaths of these young people had meaning, and that we are grateful for the sacrifices made by all.

The Minnesota Vietnam Veterans Memorial is also for those who live: the veterans, the surviving family members, the friends, and most of all the future generations who will come here and ask, Who were these people whose names are on this wall? Where were they from? Why did they have to die so young?

We are here today to affirm with our words, our tears and our love that from the sacrifices made in Vietnam can come the miracles of reconciliation and healing. Though this path may prove long and painful, we must follow it with the same courage and determination as those who served in Vietnam.

As the poet says, the deaths of the soldiers named on this wall are ours. It is up to us to remember them, to give their deaths meaning. Were they for "peace and a new hope"?

It is for us to say.



"Today is July 4th . . . I remembered your flyer and the look the man gave me when I said there was no room to put it up. Yes, I do have a store policy limiting what can be put up here. Today your flyer went up in the window anyway. Today I remembered the body bags."

Letter to MVVM from a Minneapolis businessman

"Dear Friends, this . . . contribution is for our son and brother, Edward Steven Graves. He was a paratrooper with the 173rd Airborne Brigade and was killed February 27, 1966. Steve loved Christmas, so after 25 years this will be our last Christmas gift to him."

Letter to MVVM from the parents, brother and sisters of Edward Steven Graves

"Here is small amount of donation from Lao-Hmong veterans of Vietnam War era. We fought alongside this country in Laos while you fought in South Vietnam. We are here to support Minnesota Vietnam Veterans Memorial."

Letter to MVVM from Lao-Hmong veterans

"On May 2, 1971, I lost my best friend; he was just 20 years old. At the time of his death, he was halfway around the world. It was more than two days before his body was returned to Minnesota. I'll never forget that night. It was drizzling, cold and very, very dark. Alone, we walked to the last gate at the Twin Cities Airport, no fanfare, just his family. We watched as a crate was lowered from the plane. Inside was my little brother; he had returned home from Vietnam."

Anver Larson, brother of Ronald Joe Larson, KIA

WE WERE YOUNG. WE HAVE DIED. REMEMBER US.

Schedule of Events

Saturday, September 26, 1992

2:00 to 3:30 P.M.

"Chariots of Fire"

Color Guard March

Posting of the Colors

"Star Spangled Banner"

Tebra Carter and James T. Crawford, Jr.

Welcome

Pat Miles and Mark Suppelsa,
Masters of Ceremony

"The Pledge of Allegiance"

Led by Robert Jensen, father of James A. Jensen, KIA

Invocation

Chaplain Colonel Dean E. Johnson

Speakers

Governor Arne Carlson

Richard Bergling, President, Minnesota State Council,
Vietnam Veterans of America

History of the MVVM

MVVM Board of Directors

Doug Carlson, "Billboard" Sally and Bill Popp
Design team

Richard and Sandy Naughton, James Steele
Construction Company

Speakers

Jan Scruggs, founder of the Vietnam Veterans
Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Ken Wells, former prisoner of war

Dean Stricklin, brother of Thomas G. Stricklin, KIA

"In My Life"

Tebra Carter and James T. Crawford, Jr.

Speakers

General John Vessey, Retired, former Chairman
of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

General William C. Westmoreland, Retired, former
Army Chief of Staff; former Commander, Military
Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV)

Closing Remarks

Teresa Vetter, President, Minnesota Vietnam
Veterans Memorial

"The Young Dead Soldiers"

Read by Tom Asp, Vietnam veteran

"America the Beautiful"

Margaret Sallis

21-Gun Salute

Taps

Flyovers

UH-1D Huey helicopters, C-130 Hercules,
F-16 Fighting Falcons

Reading of Names by Family Members

Led by Kathleen Weber Ross, mother of
John Knute Weber, KIA

Blacklock Photography

The Memorial

Design Goals

The Minnesota Vietnam Veterans Memorial was designed to evoke a reflective mood rather than make a political statement. It was designed to express honor and remembrance, while acknowledging valor and service, and affirming the need to grieve as well as to experience an earlier time of innocence before the war. It was designed also to remind us that the price of war is high: young men and women die, and others have their lives forever altered.

"Lakefront DMZ," created by artists and architects Nina Ackerberg, Stanton Sears, Jake Castillo and Rich Laffin of the Twin Cities, won the national design competition because it best met those goals. Every element of the Memorial, from the trees and shrubs to the selection of the stone, is imbued with layers of meaning for Minnesotans.

We hope your visits to the Memorial do not end today. We hope you come again on winter evenings after heavy storms, when wet snow clings to the names on the wall and the only footprints on the plaza are your own. We hope you come in the heat of August when oppressive humidity gives you some sense of what it must have felt like in the jungles of Indochina. And we hope that every time you come you gain a new understanding, not just of the Vietnam War, but of the giving and taking of human life.



The design team: Nina Ackerberg, Rich Laffin, Stanton Sears, Jake Castillo



Blacklock Photography

"During the design competition, I obtained from the Veterans Service Administration a list of the 1,120 Minnesotans killed or missing in action. As I read through the list and located the names and towns on a large map of Minnesota, I became aware of the sacrifices that families from the entire state had made. Many of the towns I had never even heard of. When I reached the names of the Holtzs, two men from a single small town and probably related, the thought of their loss seemed like too much to ask of any family. I finished going through the list over the next few days in great sadness."

Rich Laffin, member of the design team



A Walk Through the Memorial

- 1 A red granite map of Indochina forms the entrance to the Memorial.
- 2 A winding concrete pathway literally brings you home from Southeast Asia.
- 3 A directory will help you find a particular name.
- 4 The main plaza is surfaced with 68,000 granite squares, each representing a Minnesotan who served. 1,120 of the squares are dark green — these mark the hometowns of the Minnesotans who did not return.
- 5 All 1,120 names of Minnesota's KIAs and MIAs are engraved in this dark green granite wall.
- 6 A limestone representation of a house facade furthers the theme of homecoming.
- 7 Minnesota dolomitic limestone walls echo the feel of our many limestone riverbanks.
- 8-9 Pools, streams and native Minnesota trees and shrubs add to the sense of coming home.

How to Locate a Name

The horizontal rows of names are arranged chronologically within each year by date of casualty. The names are identified by first name — middle initial — last name. A chiseled square after the name signifies killed in action; an outlined square signifies missing in action. If you know only the name, the directory can help you find it on the wall.

The Vietnam War: A Chronology

1959

U.S. Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) trains Vietnamese forces under Lieutenant General Samuel Williams. July 8: The Vietnam War claims its first American casualties.

1960

John F. Kennedy elected President; he presses for expansion of U.S. Special Forces. Lieutenant General Lionel McGarr assumes command in Vietnam.

1961

First U.S. Special Forces deployed to Vietnam.

1962

Major General Charles Timmes assumes command in Vietnam; counter insurgency escalates; additional advisors sent. February 8: Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) established under General Paul Harkins.

Two Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1963

November 1: Overthrow of Diem government; assassination of Diem and his brother Nhu.

November 22: John F. Kennedy assassinated; Lyndon Johnson becomes President.

Three Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1964

August 7: Congress passes Gulf of Tonkin Resolution after U.S. destroyer reports attack by North Vietnamese patrol boats off the coast of Vietnam.

President Johnson orders attack on North Vietnamese patrol boat bases.

June 20: General William C. Westmoreland assumes command of MACV.

Two Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1965

March 2: Operation Rolling Thunder begins.

March 8: The first U.S. Marine infantry battalion arrives in Da Nang.

December 31: U.S. troop strength in Vietnam is 200,000.

33 Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1966

April 12: First B-52 raids on North Vietnam.

111 Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1967

January: Operation Cedar Falls begins in the Iron Triangle near Saigon.

February 12: Operation Junction City begins northwest of Saigon.

December 31: U.S. troop strength is nearly 500,000.

208 Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1968

January 30 – 31: The Tet Offensive begins.

February 24: Hue retaken by U.S. and South Vietnamese forces, ending the Tet Offensive.

March 16: My Lai 4 incident occurs.

March 31: President Johnson restricts the bombing of North Vietnam and announces he will not seek re-election.

April 5: Siege at Khe Sanh broken.

May 11: Paris Peace Talks begin.

June 10: General Creighton Abrams assumes command of U.S. forces in Vietnam.

June 24: Vietnam becomes the longest armed conflict in U.S. history.

August 26 – 29: Police and anti-war demonstrators clash violently outside Democratic convention in Chicago.

November 6: Nixon elected president.

December 31: 540,000 Americans are in Vietnam.

332 Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1969

June 8: Nixon withdraws 25,000 American troops.

December 31: U.S. troop strength drops to 480,000.

244 Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1970

April 30: U.S. and South Vietnamese forces invade Cambodia.

May 4: Four Kent State students killed by National Guard troops.

December 31: U.S. troop strength falls to 280,000.

121 Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1971

December 31: U.S. troop strength totals 140,000.

49 Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1972

May 8: Haiphong Harbor mined, bombing of North stepped up.

March 30: Easter Offensive begins.

December 31: U.S. combat troops number less than 30,000.

12 Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1973

January 27: Agreement reached between U.S. and North Vietnam to end the war.

March 29: U.S. ceases offensive ground operations; majority of U.S. troops leave South Vietnam.

April 1: Last American POWs released by North Vietnam arrive at Clark Air Force Base.

Three Minnesotans are killed or declared missing.

1974

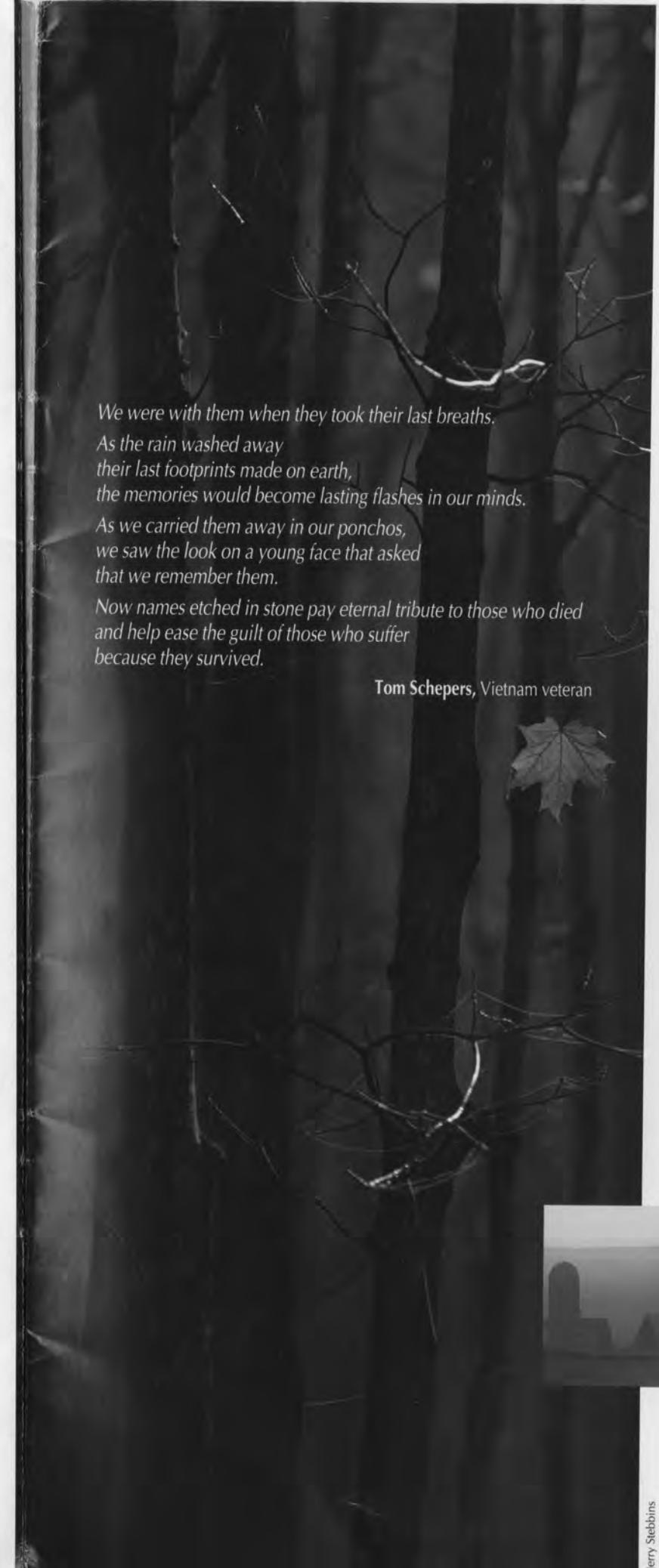
North Vietnam escalates fighting against South Vietnam.

1975

April 30: Saigon falls to North Vietnamese forces; the war ends.

Total American military personnel killed or declared missing: 58,183.

Total Minnesotans killed or declared missing: 1,120.



R. Hamilton Smith

A Final Thank You

Time and again the effort to build the Minnesota Vietnam Veterans Memorial has drawn to it people who have given generously of their time, talent, energy and money. To thank all of those who have contributed is impossible. The true thanks, especially for those with several years of their lives in this effort, will come in their knowing that this Memorial is here because of what they did. This Memorial that the people of Minnesota dedicate and give to the family members and veterans today seems small in comparison to what these soldiers gave to their country some 20 years ago.

Take one last look before you leave today and shed one last tear. Know that Minnesota has not forgotten its fallen and missing soldiers. Take one final glance and recapture the spirit of a day, a time, a place that takes you back to all that is behind a name on this wall. Let the pain enter your heart, and then rest and know that they have not died in vain.

We will never forget, and we must never let it happen again.

Teresa Vetter

President,
Minnesota Vietnam Veterans Memorial

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